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9

Stuck between a Rock and a Hard Place: Electoral Dilemmas and Turnout in the 2002 French Legislative Elections

Thomas Gschwend and Dirk Leuffen

Introduction

How does cohabitation affect turnout? Cohabitation has been differently evoked to explain the outcomes of the 2002 French elections: Whereas some authors blamed the long cohabitation between President Chirac and Prime Minister Lionel Jospin for Jean-Marie Le Pen's success at the presidential elections (Parodi, 2002), others held the issue of cohabitation responsible for the outcome of the legislative elections.¹ However, the impact of the issue of cohabitation on election turnout has not been quantitatively assessed.

In this chapter we analyse the impact of the issue of cohabitation on turnout in the French legislative elections 2002. We here treat cohabitation as the French version of divided government² in order to establish a comparative perspective, arguing that research on French politics can profit from theories and findings of general debates in the literature. At the same time the case of France can stimulate and improve comparative research on divided government, if at least by pointing out seemingly counter intuitive phenomena for other political systems.

Elections are the central link between constituents and representatives. Through elections, citizens are able to participate in policy-making – for the most part – indirectly by choosing policymakers. It is the way to hold politicians accountable. Moreover, competitive elections also establish a reverse link since elected representatives have to pay attention to their constituents in order to get re-elected. Understanding why people

participate in elections is thus one of the core questions in order to understand the nature of representation, the degree of responsiveness of a given polity and the functioning of the democratic political process at large.

By all means, there is already a vast body of literature trying to explain participation at the polls. By investigating the impact of cohabitation on turnout, however, we add a new explanation of abstention. In a catalogue compiled by Bréchon (1998: 34–40) the author explains abstention in France with socioeconomic variables, anti-political sentiments of the non-voters and a loose compilation of factors comprising various forms of situative and rationalist forms of non-participation. Bréchon's catalogue thus clearly contains most dimensions common in the political behaviour literature such as Socioeconomic Status (SES) and alienation from parties and the political system. However, another dimension that is usually called "abstention from indifference" (also see Davis *et al.* 1970: 437; Enelow and Hinich, 1984: 90) is not included in Bréchon's catalogue. Abstention from indifference is assumed to occur when eligible voters are cross-pressured; they feel torn between policy and common non-policy issues such as candidate characteristics (Enelow and Hinich, 1984: 80ff.). As an addition to this common understanding of indifference we argue here that in the 2002 French legislative elections a large part of voters were confronted with dilemmas resulting from cross-pressures of policy or partisan and polity, or as we term them here, *regime* preferences. We investigate whether in 2002 the question of a future cohabitation was an issue that cross-pressured individual voters bringing about electoral indifference and, ultimately, making them more likely to abstain.

The chapter is structured in the following manner: We start off by briefly reviewing the literature on turnout and abstention. We then develop a theory of abstention from indifference caused by partisan-regime cross-pressures. Based on this theory we generate two hypotheses that are tested in a comprehensive turnout model. Besides variables measuring partisan and regime preferences we also control for traditional explanations of turnout such as SES and alienation in this model. Our analysis is based on data derived from a survey that we conducted between the presidential and the legislative elections (Schmitt and Gschwend 2002). Estimation results and statistical simulations provide evidence that regime preferences play a decisive role for the decision to participate in an election. When someone's regime preferences conflict with his or her partisan preferences, the probability of abstention was assumed to rise – in the first round of the 2002 parliamentary election

this held especially for supporters of the left. Finally, we conclude by evaluating the impact of cohabitation on turnout in the 2002 French *legislatives* and beyond.

Abstention in France

The abstention rate of 35.6 per cent in the first round of the 2002 legislative elections just beat the Fifth Republic's *legislatives* abstention record of the year of 1988 that amounted to 34.26 per cent. The growing abstention rates since the 1970s have given rise to *lamentos* over the crisis of representation (Lijphart, 1997) and the 'dépolitisation des citoyens'.³ Abstention has become one of the most studied fields of electoral behaviour. In the case of France since Lancelot's early monograph on abstention (Lancelot, 1968), various articles have been published on the subject (Rosenthal and Sen, 1973; Chiche and Dupoirier, 1998; Subileau and Toinet, 1989; Appleton, 2000). A fine summary on the state of the art is given by Bréchon (1998: 17–42). In the literature on abstention in France the authors usually distinguish between non-registration (*non-inscription*) and abstention. The estimations on the non-registration rates vary between about 4 per cent and 11 per cent of the electorate (Appleton, 2000: 210), Bréchon assumes about 10 per cent of non-registration (Bréchon, 1998: 19). In this chapter we focus on actual abstention. However, we treat voting 'blanc et nul' (blank and invalid) as abstention, since the indifference structure to be analysed here is assumed to lead to either of the two behaviours.⁴

How is abstention explained for the case of France? Bréchon differentiates between three types of abstention dominant in France: Firstly, Bréchon explains abstention with social indicators such as low SES, secondly by anti-political sentiments that imply critical assessments of the political system as well as the political elites and, thirdly, reasons that comprise, for example, rational decisions of voters who weigh costs and benefits of their electoral participation and only vote when they expect their vote to be decisive. Other examples of non-voters are supporters who follow their favoured party's call to abstain, voters who cannot repeat their first-ballot electoral choice in the second-ballot and feel hostile towards the remaining candidates (Converse and Pierce, 1986: 344) or supporters who abstain in second-order elections to give an indirect *wake-up call* to their party that currently holds the power (Fauvelle-Aymar *et al.* 2000).⁵ However, an *abstention from indifference* resulting from psychological cross-pressured preference orders is not included in Bréchon's catalogue of abstention.⁶

Cross-pressures and turnout

No matter whether you prefer the “Columbia”, “Michigan” or “Rochester” school, traditional models of voting behaviour agree that voters are likely to vote for the party they like most. Although they have different models of an individual’s decision-making process they assume that voters are able to form *partisan preferences* that helps them to decide whether they go to the polls and for which party they are going to vote. Thus, a partisan preference is a major yardstick that helps them to come to grips with their vote-choice decision. What happens, though, if voters’ partisan preferences cannot be of any help to them because voters feel cross-pressured, that is, they feel torn between two or more parties?

Lazarsfeld *et al.* can be considered the pioneers of the effect of cross-pressures on partisan preference and voting behaviour in general (Lazarsfeld *et al.* 1948: 53, 60, 61). For Lazarsfeld *et al.* cross-pressures are “conflicts and inconsistencies among the factors which influence vote decision. [...] cross pressures upon the voter drive him in opposite directions” (Lazarsfeld *et al.* 1948: 53). The sources of this kind of cross-pressures stem from the combination of conflicting sociological factors. Campbell *et al.* use the term cross-pressure to refer to an attitude conflict bearing on the individual (Campbell *et al.* 1960: 80). For them the degree of attitude consistency determines not only the time when an individual finally reaches a firm vote intention, but they also suspect that cross-pressures arising from inconsistent attitude objects are likely to reduce the probability of turnout (Campbell *et al.* 1960: 83). In rational choice approaches, which centre on individual utility-maximising strategies as a decision criterion, a theory of *abstention from indifference* has been elaborated in more depth (Davis *et al.* 1970; Riker and Ordeshook, 1973; Enelow and Hinich, 1984; Thurner and Eymann, 2000). In spatial models of voting behaviour abstention from indifference occurs when two parties or candidates have the same Euclidian distance from the voter’s ideal point and (s)he therefore may abstain from voting “because it simply does not make much difference to him who wins” (Enelow and Hinich, 1984: 90).⁷

What if voters employ various utility functions? Or similarly: what if voters not only form partisan preferences but also form preferences about the consequences of an election on the type or structure of government? Do voters form *regime preferences*, that is, do they prefer unified over divided government or *vice versa*, and cast their vote accordingly to let their vote choice reflect their regime preferences?⁸ If voters form regime

preferences, then these preferences should influence their decision-making process as well.⁹

The election campaigns made the cohabitation issue highly salient.¹⁰ Many commentators blamed the cohabitation issue for the election outcome. The structure of the two sets of two elections also potentially enabled what might be called *regime concerned voting behaviour*. Voting behaviour is regime concerned, when individuals integrate the expected regime implications of their vote choice into their decision calculus.¹¹

How can regime preferences play out in the super election year of 2002 such that partisan and regime preferences stay in conflict with one another? Right before the first round of the parliamentary election in June of 2002 voters clearly knew that Chirac was re-elected President and which regime implications their legislative vote choices had¹²: Following a bipolar understanding of French politics a vote choice for the moderate right increased the probability of a return to unified government, while a vote choice for the left increased the probability of another cohabitation. However, this particular structure of elections, that is, the reduction of presidential term of office to five years and the modification of the electoral calendar will probably become the rule, can augment dilemmas for voters. Voters may have contrasting partisan and regime preferences that they might integrate into their decision-making process. In 2002 when an eligible voter at the same time supported a party of the left and a unified government he or she faced such a cross-pressure situation. A similar dilemma, of course, applied for a supporter of the right who actually favoured divided government.¹³

How do voters solve such cross-pressure dilemmas? Voters could either cast their vote in accordance with their partisan preferences or cast a vote that reflects their regime preferences. Alternatively they may decide to abstain altogether. When partisan and regime preferences neutralise one another, the voter might resolve the resulting cross-pressure situation by abstaining from the election.

The following two hypotheses sum up these considerations:

1. Supporters of the left preferring unified government (i.e. partisan and regime preferences are conflicting) are more likely to abstain than supporters of the left who prefer divided government.
2. Supporters of the right preferring divided government (i.e. partisan and regime preferences are conflicting) are more likely to abstain than supporters of the right who prefer unified government.

Operationalisation

The data we analyse here comes from a survey conducted between the second round of the presidential elections and the first round of the elections for the *Assemblée nationale*.¹⁴ The respondents thus knew that Jacques Chirac was re-elected as President.

Our dependent variable, turnout at the first round of the *legislatives*, is dichotomously scoring one if the respondent intends to vote for a particular party candidate and zero otherwise including casting an invalid or blank ballot. To investigate the impact of regime preferences on turnout¹⁵ we first had to identify a voter's attitude towards cohabitation. For this we used the following item:

«S'agissant d'une éventuelle future cohabitation, de quelle opinion vous sentez-vous le plus proche?»¹⁶

Then, respondents were presented the following alternatives: (a) «*une cohabitation serait une bonne chose pour la France*», or (b) «*une cohabitation serait une mauvaise chose pour la France*».¹⁷

How do respondents generate an answer to such a question? From research on the survey response, we know that voters simply make one up if they have no ready-made answer they could provide (Zaller, 1992; Zaller and Feldman, 1992). To make-up an answer, it is likely that respondents in an interview situation encode this question purely in a partisan way since they are likely to have at least some kind of partisan orientation to draw on. Encoded in this manner and given the outcome of the *présidentielles*, leftists should therefore favour cohabitation while voters on the right should consequently oppose cohabitation. A purely partisan interpretation of the issue, however, can be neglected for the group that we are primarily interested in, which are the eligible voters who express contrasting regime and partisan preferences.

Our hypotheses predict that if voters' partisan and regime preferences are conflicting, then they are more likely to abstain than voters where partisan and regime preferences are in line. Thus besides voters' attitudes towards cohabitation we need to measure their partisan preferences as well.

We derive every respondent's partisan preference order from standard 10-point party likes/dislikes scales to find out his or her most preferred party. Supporters of the political right are coded 1 if they most prefer a party of the political right, such as *Union pour la démocratie française* (UDF), *Rassemblement pour la république* (RPR) or *Démocratie libérale*

(DL).¹⁸ Analogously, supporters of the political left are coded 1 if they most prefer a party of the left, such as *Parti socialiste* (PS), the Greens, *Parti communiste français* (PCF) or *Mouvement des citoyens* (MDC).¹⁹ The excluded category, thus, consists of respondents who most prefer parties of the extreme left and right.²⁰ All together we have likes/dislikes scales for nine parties including all parties above as well as *Front national* (FN) (extreme right) and *Lutte ouvrière* (LO) (extreme left). We will not engage in the debate on whether left–right ideological attachment or party identification should be used as political anchor in France (Converse and Pierce, 1993; Fleury and Lewis-Beck, 1993a,b; Fauvelle-Aymar *et al.* 2000: 398). Instead, in addition to party preferences we also control for ideological self-placement in order to determine broadly where a voter is anchored into the political realm. Ideology is measured as respondent's self-placement on 11-point left/right scale recoded to a 0 to 1 scale where higher values reflect a self-placement further on the right.

In order to test our main hypotheses we construct two dummy variables indicating whether or not partisan and regime preferences are conflicting. Thus supporters of the left score 1 on the 'regime-left' dummy if they oppose cohabitation and supporters of the right score 1 on the 'regime-right' dummy if they favour cohabitation. Thus we expect both dummies to be significantly negative since voters faced with this cross-pressure situation should be less likely to turnout. In our sample we find that about 15 per cent of the supporters of the right favour cohabitation, that is, they report polity preferences that stay in contrast with their partisan preferences. For supporters of the left the respective number is even higher. Here almost every third supporter of the left reports a polity preference that cross-pressures his or her partisan preference. Moreover, every fourth respondent that plans to abstain faces such a cross-pressure situation. These people are on average slightly higher educated and place themselves ideologically more to the left than the average respondent in our sample.

Our main hypotheses are geared towards explaining turnout at the individual level that should operate above and beyond well-known and often replicated findings about hypothetical causal mechanisms that predict turnout. It is important to control for these alternative causal mechanisms in order to establish that there is a specific cross-pressure effect on turnout and separate it out from the effects of the remaining variables to assess the particular strength of this cross-pressure effect on turnout (Gschwend, 2003). Following Brèchon's (1998) typology of abstention in France, we control for alternative hypotheses by including the following variables in our model. First, to control for socioeconomic

status of the respondent we include the respondent's age (ranging from 18 to 84 in our sample) in our model as well as 0 to 1 scales for education and income.²¹ We refer to the Appendix for the exact coding.

Second, in order to account for the anti-political dimension that is thought to partly explain turnout behaviour we include measures for partisan alienation, political interest and political efficacy. Partisan alienation refers to the feeling of minimal connection to one's most preferred party.²² We measure the intensity of that feeling by the difference of a respondent's placement of his or her most preferred party from the theoretical maximum value (i.e., 10) on the party likes/dislikes scale and recode it to a 0 to 1 scale. Political interest is known to have an impact on an individual's decision to participate in the election (Lazarsfeld *et al.* 1948: 47; Campbell *et al.* 1960: 102; Lancelot, 1968: 162–167; Verba and Nie, 1972). We measure it subjectively by a respondent's self-placement on a 4-point scale ranging from 0 ("not at all interested") to 1 ("very interested"). Finally, starting with Campbell *et al.* (1954: 187) the political behaviour literature suggests that political efficacy is also a strong predictor of turnout. We construct an additive political efficacy index, reflecting a respondent's subjective perception of political competence to influence the political system, based on four efficacy-items to control for that. We refer to the appendix for the exact wording.²³

Third, in order to account for the election-specific dimension, we measure the impact of abstention from indifference. As we have argued, indifference can arise not only because respondents feel cross-pressured given their policy preferences, something the current literature suggests, we additionally propose that abstention from indifference might occur because a voter's partisan and regime preferences are conflicting. We assume that respondents' policy preferences as well as the importance they attribute to various policies colour their partisan lenses with which they perceive the political realm. At the same time respondents' partisan preferences reflect to some degree their policy preferences. Parties, in such a respect, can thus to some degree be perceived as policy bundles. Therefore indifferent partisans most prefer a party of the left and of the right at the same time. Hence, we construct a dummy for the group with indifferent partisan preferences. Respondents are coded 1 if they have tied both, a party of the left and the right, on the first rank and 0 otherwise.²⁴

Cohabitation turns me out?

In order to test our two hypotheses and assess their substantive impact on the decision to turnout, controlling for rival or complementing

hypotheses, we estimate a logit model. The coefficient estimates are presented in Table 9.1 whereby the last two independent variables are the key variables to test our hypotheses.

Overall, the fit of our turnout model is excellent. Based on this model we correctly predict more than nine out of ten respondents. A naive guess that everyone would turn out given the skewed distribution of the dependent variable would allow one to predict turnout with 91.6 per cent accuracy. Our model yields after all an 8.5 per cent reduction in error over this baseline naive guess.²⁵ The message of the results is unambiguous. The universe of possible explanations of turnout is clearly multidimensional. The anti-political dimension seems to be the main dimension that is able to explain turnout in France. It might be surprising to some observers of French politics but the SES dimension does not contribute above and beyond the anti-political as well as conjunctural dimensions to an explanation of turnout. We find that quite comforting because it shows that a political act like turnout seems to be best explained by

Table 9.1 A logit model predicting turnout at the first round of the legislative elections

Independent variables	Coef.	Std. Err.	<i>p</i>
Constant	0.871	0.923	0.345
SES dimension			
Age	0.020	0.011	0.072
Education	0.089	0.638	0.889
Income	-1.238	0.929	0.183
Anti-political dimension			
Alienation	-3.143	0.815	0.000
Political Interest	2.135	0.760	0.005
Political Efficacy	3.080	0.866	0.000
Conjunctural dimension			
Indifference	-0.675	0.602	0.262
Ideology	-0.506	0.725	0.485
Right	-0.341	0.575	0.554
Left	0.157	0.589	0.789
Regime-Right	1.325	1.071	0.216
Regime-Left	-0.946	0.440	0.031
<i>N</i>	705		
McFadden's Pseudo R^2	0.235		
Percent reduction in error	8.5		
Percent correctly predicted	92.3		

Note: *p*-values are for two-tailed tests based on robust (White-Huber) standard errors.

political and attitudinal variables instead of coarse social characteristics. There might be possible conditional effects of SES factors on turnout that we have not specified here but there are no significant main effects of any conceivable SES variable on turnout, although age comes close. All three indicators of the anti-political dimension – alienation, political interests as well as political efficacy – on the other hand, as expected, exert a significant effect on turnout, confirming prior work on this topic.

The main interest of this analysis is, however, to assess the impact of the conjectural dimension on turnout. Does this dimension contribute to the explanation of turnout? It seems that voters that are indifferent between a party of the left and a party of the right are not significantly more likely to abstain than to turn out. Thus abstention seems to be no typical way out of this dilemma for respondents with indifferent partisan preferences.²⁶

If we focus merely on whether respondents are anchored on the left or the right of the political spectrum whereby their polity preferences are in line with their partisan preferences (measured by the “Right” and “Left” dummy), as expected, our results do not provide evidence that such respondents are systematically more likely to turn out or to abstain. However, if respondents feel cross-pressured because they prefer on the one hand a party of the left but on the other hand prefer unified over divided government, as the “Regime-Left” dummy indicates, such respondents are systematically less likely to go to the polls. For such respondents abstention seems to be a way out of this cross-pressure situation – a finding that confirms our first hypothesis. We cannot confirm our second hypothesis, though, since respondents who prefer a party on the right and prefer divided government are not systematically different in their propensity to participate than supporters of the right who favour unified government. Thus, attitudes towards cohabitation seem to exert significant cross-pressures only for supporters of the left.

Why is that? We think there are at least two explanations responsible for producing this asymmetry. First, we have the campaign strategy of the left demonising cohabitation early on and thereby making this issue stick with their electorate. Of course, the left run into problems with such a strategy after loosing the *présidentielles*. Thus the discourse against cohabitation to persuade the public that France needs to restore a coherent executive is likely to produce more cross-pressures on the left than the right. This can only be part of an explanation since the cross-pressures on the right are not simply weaker but essentially inexistent. Thus, there has to be a second explanation. Imagine a supporter of the right

preferring cohabitation because this supporter supposedly favours checking power and balancing policy over a coherent executive. But who should be elected to check power? The left is not really a strong and unified counterpart going into the parliamentary elections and without a charismatic leader it is hard to foresee what kind of balance such a supporter would get. Given the strong showing of Le Pen, a unified government might not be the preferred option but is still a better option than having a strong extreme right in parliament. Thus, rather than abstaining, such supporters do actually turnout overcoming their cross-pressures and, conceivably, also trying to minimise the impact of the extremists, too.

Nevertheless, based on our data, abstention by indifference seems to be relevant not merely when respondents feel cross-pressured given their policy preferences, something the literature suggests, but rather when respondents' clear partisan and polity preferences are not in line with one another. Our results show that abstention by indifference need not be simply a partisan or policy cross-pressure effect. In order to become politically relevant, abstention by indifference has to be associated with a feeling of being torn between policy (or partisan) and polity (or regime) preferences that create cross-pressures. Thus, in addition to partisan indifference, we argue that particular cross-pressure situations might drive voters to abstain. In the case of the 2002 elections they abstain not because they are indifferent between parties but rather because their partisan and regime preferences are conflicting.

How strong are these cross-pressure effects compared to other effects? Since a logit model is non-linear and non-additive, the substantive interpretation of these coefficients is not straightforward. The effects of estimated coefficients depend upon values of the other variables and coefficients. To take full advantage of the information available in these estimation results we run some statistical simulations to compute quantities of substantive interest based on these coefficients.²⁷ One way to assess the substantive impact is through "first differences" (King *et al.* 2000). The idea behind this is to compare the predicted likelihood of turnout of two hypothetical voters who only differ in a characteristic of interest. The difference of the model predictions between these two hypothetical voters represents the substantive impact of this characteristic. So let us define two hypothetical respondents that most prefer a party of the left. Let's assume that both respondents are no different from the average French respondent in our survey in terms of their characteristics on both, the SES as well as the anti-political dimensions. We purposefully let them differ in their attitudes towards cohabitation,

though. One of them favours divided government, that is, regime preferences are in line with partisan preferences. The simulations reveal that such a respondent has a probability of about 97 per cent to actually turn out at the first round of the *legislatives*. The other hypothetical respondent opposes divided government and consequently has to deal with this cross-pressure situation. His or her predicted probability to actually turn out drops to about 92 percent. Thus, having to deal with such a cross-pressure situation between partisan and regime preferences reduces the predicted probability of going to the polls of an otherwise average supporter of the left by about 5 percentage points. This finding has profound consequences for the designing of election campaigns. From this perspective it becomes clear why the campaign managers of the right framed the *legislatives* as anti-cohabitation elections after winning the presidency. Besides mobilising their own electorate focussing the issue of cohabitation and highlighting its consequences on vote choice, if not persuading to switch sides, it, at least, induces cross-pressures for supporters of the left that can be convinced that cohabitation is a bad idea for France. This was likely to prove successful for supporters of the left as targeted audience since the left had come out against cohabitation early on (Chiroux, 2001a: 94; Schrameck, 2001: 23). Thus, campaigning on this issue seems to demobilise supporters of the left if their regime and partisan preferences are not in line with one another. This might be all the more consequential, of course, when the lower the respondent's political efficacy or political interest is or the more alienated the respondent feels from the political parties. Given lower than average values on the efficacy or interest scales (or higher than average values on the alienation scale) the cross-pressures from conflicting partisan and regime preferences might be already enough to tip the see-saw to the abstention side.

We, again, use some statistical simulations that allow us to be more precise about the magnitude of this cross-pressure effect and the conditions that might drive an otherwise average voter into abstention. In order to do that we simulate the predicted probability of two classes of hypothetical voters. These voters have an average value on the ideology scale and the same socioeconomic status throughout. Their values on age, income and education are set to the sample mean.²⁸ Moreover, since the cross-pressure effect is anti-symmetric and only applies to supporters of the left, we simulate only the probability to turn out for supporters of the left. For the first class of voters, we assume that their regime preferences are in line with their partisan preference, that is, they prefer cohabitation while for the second class we assume that they

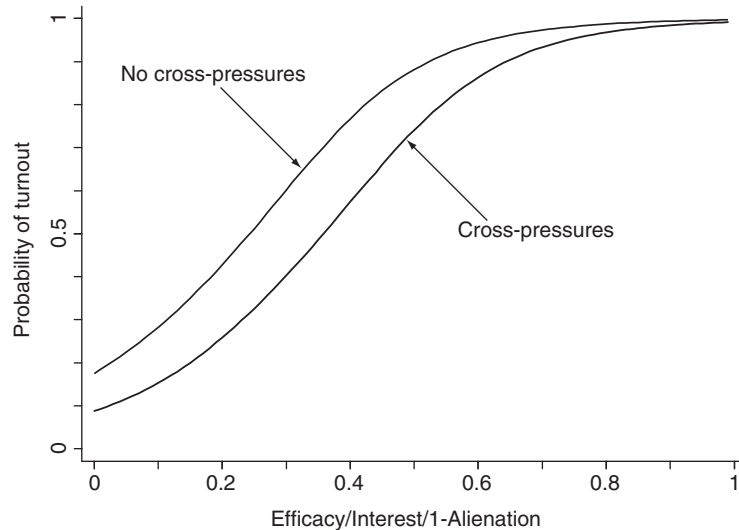


Figure 9.1 Cross-pressure effect for supporters of the Left.

face partisan-regime cross-pressure effects. Finally, we generate predicted probabilities for both classes of supporters of the left conditional on characteristics of the anti-political dimension. In Figure 9.1 we plot these probabilities if we move all three variables of this dimension – political efficacy, political interest and alienation (more precisely: 1-alienation) – simultaneously from their minimum (at 0) to their maximum (at 1).

These simulations make transparent the nature of the cross-pressure effect for average supporters of the left. Across the entire range of efficacy, interest as well as alienation the probability to turn out for supporters of the left is lower when partisan and regime preferences conflict. Values above the 50 per cent reference line indicate that our model predicts that these supporters of the left will actually turn out while for supporters that fall below that line we predict that they will abstain. While there is not much of a difference for supporters of the left if they score either very high or very low on efficacy, interest and alienation the cross-pressure effect resulting from conflicting regime and partisan preferences becomes in fact consequential for tipping the see-saw to the abstention side. From the above graph we can see that for an average supporter of the left scoring between 0.25 and 0.35 on the

efficacy and interest scale and scoring 0.65 ($=1-0.35$) and 0.75 ($1-0.25$) on the alienation scale it makes a substantive difference in their decision-making process whether to go to the polls. If such voters get persuaded that cohabitation is a bad idea for France they feel cross-pressured enough to be demobilised. The consequence is that they will no longer turnout.

How strong does this partisan-regime cross-pressure effect actually get? Since we model the decision to turn out at the polls as a logit model, this effect is non-linear by design. The magnitude of this effect is conditional on all other independent variables in the model. Figure 9.2 provides an overview about the magnitude of these effects.

The magnitude of this effect is the difference in predicted probability to turn out between the two classes of supporters of the left, that is, the predicted probability of the no cross-pressure class minus the one of the class facing this cross-pressure situation. Given certain values of the independent variables this effect can be substantially strong. Based on the scenario we defined in our simulations above we find that the difference in predicted probability for two average supporters of the left can rise up to 20 percentage points alone and averages still at even more

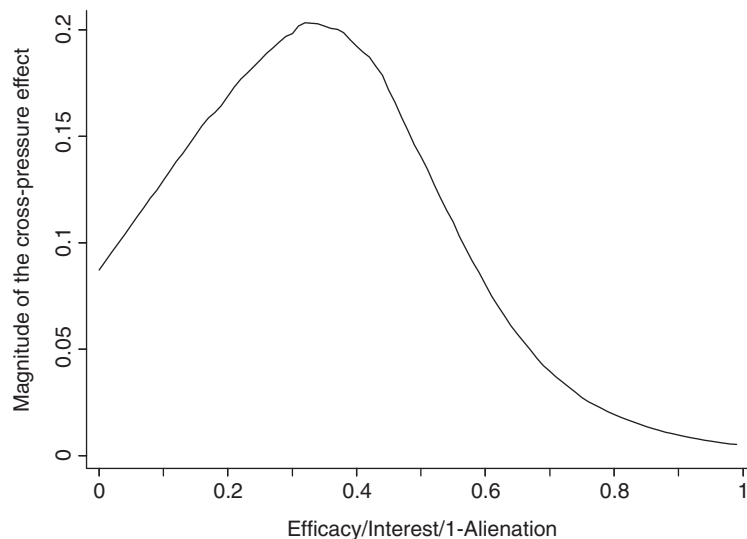


Figure 9.2 How strong is the cross-pressure effect on the probability to turnout?

than 10 percentage points. In general we can see that the cross-pressure effect seems to be much more consequential for supporters of the left that score low on efficacy and interest, and high on alienation. The effect rapidly decreases for values of efficacy and interest above 0.5 (and below 0.5 for alienation). Apparently, supporters of the left that are high in efficacy and have a strong interest in politics but are not strongly alienated from the political parties seem to be better equipped to deal with the indifference between their partisan and regime preferences such that they are able to decide that they turn out – no matter what. Since the cost of casting a ballot for a candidate of the political right might be too high, abstention seems to be a systematic way out, particularly for supporters of the left that face such a cross-pressure situation. Thus regime preferences do have a substantive impact on a voter's decision to turn out at the polls that can complement well-known rival explanations.

To be sure, all the factors describing the anti-political dimension of the universe of explanations have an even greater impact on an individual's decision-making process to turn out. For an otherwise average respondent (all other variables are set to their sample mean) the predicted probability based on our turnout model decreases by about 11 percentage points if political interest decreases from its maximum to its minimum. The substantive impact of political efficacy and alienation is even stronger. Compared to an otherwise average respondent high in political efficacy, an average voter low in political efficacy is almost 24 percentage points less likely to turn out. The difference between average respondents who are high and low alienated is 31 percentage points. Partisan alienation, thus, exerts the strongest effect in our model.

To sum up, regime preferences have predictable implications on a voter's decision-making process. The impact of regime preferences on a voter's decision to turn out does have a substantive impact for supporters of the left as hypothesised, if their attitudes toward cohabitation stay in conflict to their partisan preferences. Although this effect is not stronger than the ones from the anti-political dimension, the partisan-regime cross-pressure effect, in fact, does operate in addition to them. Moreover, since these cross-pressures affect turnout asymmetrically, abstention has important consequences on the outcome of the election (Fauvelle-Aymar *et al.* 2000: 398). Thus, the cross-pressure effect we identify is not only of theoretical interest but also becomes substantively meaningful given its magnitude for a particular segment of partisans of the left whose partisan and regime preferences are conflicting.

Conclusion

The universe of explanations of turnout is clearly multidimensional. Consistent with prior research in the political behaviour literature on turnout, we find that factors like political efficacy, political interest and low alienation strongly predict turnout. Socioeconomic factors, however, do not add much explanatory power above and beyond efficacy, interest and alienation.

Based on assumptions that conflicting partisan and regime preferences exert cross-pressures we expected that it is more likely for eligible voters to abstain if their partisan and regime preferences stay in contrast to one another than for those voters whose partisan and regime preferences are consistent, that is, they pull the voter in the same direction. Controlling for various rival explanations we find evidence supporting these hypotheses for supporters of the left. Supporters of the left preferring unified government are more likely to abstain than supporters of the left preferring cohabitation. However, we could not find an equivalent effect for supporters of the right. Thus supporters of the right preferring cohabitation are not more likely to abstain than supporters of the right preferring unified government. Abstention from indifference based on conflicting partisan and regime preferences yields an asymmetric cross-pressure effect in favour of the political right since supporters of the left got demobilised.

Does this come as a surprise? On the one hand, the political leaders of the left had declared for a long time that cohabitation would damage the Republic's institutions. It was very difficult for the left to change their discourse after their failure at the presidential election and to actually praise the advantages of a future cohabitation. Certain attempts, in fact, lacked credibility. On the other hand, the left was presumably not perceived strong and unified enough for supporters of the right to let their regime preferences play out strongly if they prefer cohabitation despite their partisan preferences. Thus it is likely that regime preferences of these supporters of the right have not been a credible alternative decision criterion. Consequently there is no cross-pressure situation if the implications of their regime preferences are not strong enough to stay in conflict with their partisan preferences. Even if some supporters of the right felt cross-pressured overcoming them, it has the added bonus that it also minimises the success of the extreme right in the parliamentary elections as well.

In single-member district systems parties' mobilisation capacity can be decisive for the electoral outcomes (Dolez, 2002). In competitive

races, since the winner takes it all, mobilisation of just a few per cent of voters can play a decisive role. Our simulations show that the cross-pressure effects from holding regime and partisan preferences that are not in line with one another are strongest for voters with below average values on political efficacy and interest as well as above average values on the alienation scale. In order to study these effects for the outcome of the election we suspect that abstention caused by these cross-pressure effects might be much more consequential in certain constituencies than in others. In order to assess the electoral impact of this type of abstention we need to classify in future research constituencies with voters exerting high and low levels of political efficacy, alienation and political interest. Supposedly, in a bourgeois suburb of Paris we should find less impact of this type of abstention on the local election outcome than in socially more heterogeneous constituencies. Additionally, future research on this type of abstention is necessary, particularly in other political systems as well. The 2002 US midterm elections, for instance, seem to be a suitable case.

From a normative point of view the type of abstention that we detect in this chapter does not seem particularly problematic to us. Abstention from indifference based on individual psychological conflicts is not necessarily an indicator of a citizens 'dépolitisation' or a crisis of the political system.

Appendix

Income (rescaled 0 to 1)

1. moins de 2000 francs/moins de 305 €
2. De 2001 à 3000 francs/de 305 à 457 €
3. De 3001 à 5000 francs/de 458 à 762 €
4. De 5001 à 7500 francs/de 763 à 1.143 €
5. De 7501 à 10.000 francs/de 1.144 à 1.524 €
6. De 10.001 à 15.000 francs/de 1.525 à 2.286 €
7. De 15.001 à 20.000 francs/de 2.287 à 3.048 €
8. De 20.001 à 30.000 francs/de 3.049 à 4.573 €
9. De 30.001 à 40.000 francs/de 4.574 à 6.097 €
10. De 40.001 à 50.000 francs/de 6.098 à 7.622 €
11. 50.001 francs et plus/7.623 € et plus

Education (rescaled 0 to 1)

1. Sans diplôme
2. ertificat d'études primaires
3. Ancien brevet, BEPC
4. Certificat d'aptitude professionnel (CAP)

172 *Stuck between a Rock and a Hard Place*

5. Brevet d'enseignement professionnel (BEP)
6. BAC d'enseignement technique
7. BAC d'enseignement général
8. BAC + 2 ou niveau BAC + 2 ans (DUT, BTS, instituteurs, DEUG)
9. Diplôme universitaire de l'enseignement supérieur (2^e, 3^e cycles)
10. Grandes Ecoles/Ecole d'Ingénieurs

Political Efficacy Scale: 4 Items

1. Dans l'ensemble, êtes-vous très satisfait, assez satisfait, peu satisfait ou pas du tout satisfait du fonctionnement de la démocratie en France ? (4-point scale)
2. Certaines personnes disent "qu'il y a une différence selon celui qui est au pouvoir". D'autres disent "qu'il n'y a aucune différence quel que soit celui qui est au pouvoir". Vous même, où vous situeriez vous sur une échelle de 1 à 5 où le chiffre 1 signifie "il y a une différence selon celui qui est au pouvoir" et le chiffre 5 signifie "il n'y a aucune différence quel que soit celui qui est au pouvoir"? (5-point scale)
3. Certaines personnes pensent que ce qu'on vote ne change rien. D'autres pensent que ce qu'on vote peut faire changer les choses. Où vous situez-vous sur une échelle de 1 à 5 où le chiffre 1 signifie "ce qu'on vote ne change rien" et le chiffre 5 signifie "ce qu'on vote peut faire changer les choses"? (5-point scale)
4. Êtes-vous tout à fait d'accord, plutôt d'accord, plutôt pas d'accord ou pas du tout d'accord avec la proposition suivante: La démocratie a peut-être des défauts mais elle est meilleure que les autres formes de gouvernement. (4-point scale)

Notes

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1. For example, Laurent Fabius in an interview with *Le Nouvel Observateur* of 11th July 2002 speaks of a "défaite des législatives en juin par rejet de la cohabitation" (see also Cole 2002, 335).
2. This view is supported for example by Elgie (2001), Shugart (1995) and Alesina and Rosenthal (1995). For a different assessment, see Pierce (1991). In this chapter, moments of executive coherence are respectively considered as unified government. We neither consider coalition governments nor the so-called informal cohabitation between President Giscard d'Estaing and Prime Minister Jacques Chirac as examples of divided government (Sundquist 1988; Laver and Shepsle 1991).
3. Chiche *et al.* give an account of this literature on France (Chiche *et al.* 1992: 166–174).
4. Voting blank in this respect can be considered an 'abstention civique' (Bréchon, 1998: 40). The error or invalidity component of 'blanc et nul' does not concern us here since we analyse respondent's voting *intentions*.
5. Bréchon finds that systematic abstention, that is, that a citizen always abstains across all sorts of elections, is rather exceptional (Bréchon, 1998: 39). Systematic abstention is usually explained by SES and anti-political reasons.

6. Nevertheless, there is a hint about the possibility of neutralising cross-pressures in his chapter on the 'blanc et nul' vote (Bréchon 1998: 40).
7. On rational choice and turnout more generally, compare Aldrich (1993).
8. We follow Sartori who has argued that the Fifth Republic oscillates between the two poles of presidential and parliamentary regime characteristics (Sartori, 1994: 123). Whereas during *cohabitation* the parliamentary logic prevails, during the periods of unified government a presidential reading of the constitution is dominant. We understand regime voting as an umbrella term, comprising a voting behaviour that alternatively favours unified or divided government (Gschwend and Leuffen, 2003).
9. Since the late 1980s, authors like Fiorina (1991), Jacobson (1990), Wattenberg (1991), Sigelman *et al.* (1997), have been investigating the electoral origins of divided government. However, the systemic turn of voting theory has rarely been transformed to the interpretation of unified government election outcomes.
10. Interestingly, it was the Socialist Party that started to frame the elections as a return to unified government. As early as in January 2000 Lionel Jospin at the Congress of Grenoble expressed his desire that the Frenchmen would restore a coherent executive (Chiroux, 2001a: 94). Another early expression of this idea can be found in Olivier Schrameck's famous 'Matignon – Rive gauche' (Schrameck, 2001: 23). After President Chirac's re-election his supporting camp, the *Union pour la majorité présidentielle* (UMP) is reported to have centred its campaign strongly on the cohabitation issue (Bell and Criddle, 2002: 656, 657; *Libération*, 4th June 2002).
11. We are not the first ones, to be sure, that discuss potential consequences of feeling cross-pressured between two different preference orders that typically facilitate an individual's decision-making process. Boy and Dupoirier have discussed cross-pressure situations for the case of France and identify voters that are subject to them (1993: 157). For these voters "the forces that affect behaviour would tend to cancel one another out" (Boy and Dupoirier, 1993: 157). Boy and Dupoirier speculate that the effects of such cross-pressures could further abstention. They, however, find the cross-pressure issue difficult to operationalise.
12. The time lag seems too small to expect massive occurrence of negative voting. However, it is evident that Chirac's enormous success at the presidential elections does not reflect his popularity and that the legislative election result cannot just be explained by his personal pulling power. Thus the coat-tail mechanisms that link the two sets of elections are not as evident as might seem from a short glance at the results.
13. The support for divided government has only recently declined (Grunberg, 1999; Chiroux, 2001b). A rapid decline of public opinion towards cohabitation can be seen when comparing the Louis Harris polling results on cohabitation published in *Libération* on 7th March with the ones published on 29th March 2002. This change of opinion, however, might not last for long and even in our data on 2002 some supporters of the right expressed sympathies for a future cohabitation.
14. We used the *French Inter-election Survey 2002 – The French CSES II Study* (Schmitt and Gschwend, 2002), administered by CSA, Paris.
15. Abstention is usually difficult to measure within survey research since only few people admit their intention not to vote. For example, in our survey

174 *Stuck between a Rock and a Hard Place*

only about 8.4 per cent of respondent's expressed their intention to abstain or to vote '*blanc*'. To repeat, the actual turnout rate at the first round of elections was 35.6 per cent.

16. Considering a possible future cohabitation, to which of these opinions do you feel closer?
17. (a) Cohabitation is good for France; (b) Cohabitation is bad for France.
18. When the survey was designed the development of the UMP was not evident and we expected that voters still use familiar party labels as their political referents.
19. Respondents might also most prefer a party of the left and of the right at the same time. We interpret this as a sign of indifference. See p.xx.
20. Even if a respondent most prefers a moderate (left or right) and an extreme party at the same time, he or she is coded as an extremist. Based on respondent's placement of parties on the 10-point likes/dislikes scale we divide up the electorate into 51 per cent supporters of the left, 31 per cent supporters of the right, 8 per cent extremists, and 10 per cent respondents without clear partisan preferences.
21. On the issue of voting behaviour of young voters in the 2002 elections, compare Muxel (2002).
22. The intensity of partisan preferences has long been considered a strong predictor of electoral participation (Campbell *et al.* 1960: 97).
23. These four efficacy items have an *average inter-item correlation* of 0.22 and the additive scale has an *alpha reliability* of 0.52.
24. Other reasons of abstention are difficult to operationalise since with our data we can neither focus on abstentions longitudinally nor does it permit to deeply investigate into local structures and the nature of the electoral competition at the constituency level. Since we are requesting the vote intention for the first round, the incentives for certain types of strategic abstention are supposedly absent.
25. We predict every sixth abstainer correctly, which is quite good given the skewed distribution of the dependent variable.
26. Based on a vote-choice model presented elsewhere (Gschwend and Leuffen, 2003), we show that unanchored respondents with indifferent partisan preferences are more likely to end-up on the bandwagon and voting for the right.
27. We use CLARIFY (Tomz *et al.* 2001), a set of Stata ado-files, to carry out these simulations.
28. Thus, we fix ideology at 0.5, age at 44.5 years, education at 0.52 and income at 0.5.

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